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FBIS TRENDS
23 APRIL 1980

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USSR - IRAN

MOSCOW OFFERS TEHRAN LOW-LEVEL SUPPORT AGAINST U.S. PRESSURE

Moscow appears to be positioning itself to make political capital in the event the United States takes any military measures against Iran. At the same time, the Soviets have avoided any warning of counteraction. Low-level comment has suggested that the "much more resolute" military action being contemplated in Washington could escalate into "a wide international conflict," but Moscow has yet to respond authoritatively to the heightened U.S.-Iranian tension. Soviet media continue to proclaim the USSR's support for Iran in its struggle with "U.S. imperialism," and, against the background of increased speculation over Western economic sanctions, Moscow has reported the signing of a Soviet-Iranian protocol expressing the two sides' readiness to "expand joint economic relations."

MILITARY MEASURES, HOSTAGE QUESTION

Moscow registered its concern over a possible escalation of the U.S.-Iran crisis in a 21 April Yuriy Soltan commentary--broadcast in English, Persian and several other languages--which accused the United States of "pushing the world into war." Like another low-level talk, broadcast to the Arab world on 9 April, the Soltan commentary chided the Administration for "playing a risky game with fire." In a 22 April dispatch, IZVESTIYA New York correspondent Melor Sturua, building upon Soltan's comments, reported that in Washington "practically everybody is saber-rattling." As in several other recent Soviet reports, Sturua went on to speculate on specific scenarios for U.S. military action. A 16 April commentary broadcast in Persian asserted that the USSR's "serious warning" last year had "neutralized" the imperialists' plans for intervention at that time. The fact that Iran "has not been attacked yet," it claimed, is "largely due to Soviet policy."

On the hostage question, Sturua asserted that imperialist propaganda is manipulating "the personal tragedy of the hostages" and Americans' sense of national honor, "wrongly interpreted," to kindle what he referred to as a "chauvinistic hysteria." Recalling a theme of previous Soviet commentaries, he went on to assert that the "hostage incident" was not the cause of the present crisis but a "pretext" that Washington had long sought to implement its global claims. On the other hand, in a rare, if not unprecedented, intimation to the Iranian audience of disapproval of the embassy takeover, a newscast item broadcast by Moscow radio's Persian-language service on 18 April replayed a statement by an obscure British union official opposing "the holding of American hostages in Tehran."

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SOVIET SUPPORT,
ECONOMIC PROTOCOL

Soviet media have continued to reiterate the USSR's general support for Iran against U.S. pressure but so far have provided few specifics on the type and scope of prospective assistance to the Tehran regime. For example, PRAVDA on the 17th cited the Swedish foreign minister as saying that joint measures by the United States and its allies against Iran will not hurt that country's economy, since Iran can obtain the goods it needs from other countries, "especially the socialist countries." A more direct signal of Soviet intentions in the event of an expanded Western embargo came in a 23 April Persian-language newscast announcing the conclusion of a Soviet-Iranian protocol on economic and technical cooperation. The announcement, which provided no details on the scope or type of any future Soviet assistance to Iran, appeared to outline the agenda for future Soviet-Iranian talks in late May. According to the radio account, the protocol records the intent of both sides to expand economic cooperation in the future. A report in an English-language broadcast later on the 23d quoted the Iranian minister of economy and finance as saying that Iran and the Soviet Union had reached agreement on transporting Iranian imports through the USSR "in case of necessity." The minister also announced, the radio reported, that the two countries will soon "resume talks" on shipping Iranian gas to the Soviet Union.